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RURAL LIFE AND THE FAMILY

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This paper does not pretend to be a scientific statement of all of the reactions which environing conditions may bring to bear upon the family living in the open country. So far as I am aware, this whole matter has not been worked out by anyone with any degree of fulness. I wish that some of our sociologists would take up seriously the study of the effect of typical rural life, not only upon the rural family, but upon the rural individual, and determine the relationships between the rural environment and the rural mind. I am here merely setting down some observations which are the result of considerable association with the rural people in different parts of the country, and of some attempts to study the structure and influence of various rural social institutions.

Isolation is the chief social characteristic of rural life. But, so far as isolation is a physical fact, rather than a state of mind, the word must be used in a wholly relative sense. Isolation of country life varies all the way from the occasional hamlets and villages of the closely populated irrigation districts, to the genuine loneliness of the almost boundless stock ranges, with all gradations between. It is, however, the one great fact that stands out in any comparison between the social environment of a family living on the land, and a family living in the town or city.

This isolation is a separateness of the farming class from other classes. Consequently, a family belonging to this separated class must be influenced by the characteristics and the standards common to the class as a whole. It is also an isolation of families. A very small proportion of our American farm families live in hamlets or villages. The families of the farm are scattered; few farm homes are closely adjacent, at least from the point of view of the city man.

Of course it is to be observed that physical contact in the city means nothing, from the family point of view. Contiguity does not necessarily breed acquaintanceship. Probably the mere fact of farmhouses being twenty rods apart, or half a mile apart, is not so significant as the fact that separateness of the farming class and scattered farm homes produce a lack of social friction between individuals, between families, and between classes, that has a significant bearing on all those concerned.

What, now, are the chief influences of this isolated mode of living upon the life and characteristics of the family, considered as a unit? I list them as follows:

1. Family life in the country is tied to the industry of the country. This unquestionably makes for interest in the work of the farm. Of course, it may also result in hatred of farm work. It makes drudgery easy. It makes it difficult to get away from one's work. But this much is true, nevertheless, that the farm family may be considered an industrial, as well as a social, unit, whether the influences of this condition are good or bad, or both. It probably has both good and bad effects; but, on the social side, it certainly has a significant result which may become our second point:

2. There is a co-operative unity in the farm family that is rather striking. The whole family is engaged in work that is of common interest. The whole family often "turns to," when a task is to be carried out. When the holiday comes, the whole family takes part in it. Compared with the average city family, individual interests are subordinated. Each member of the family knows what is going on. Each is in touch with the

plans of the head of the family, in general if not in detail. The mother's work is ever before the eyes of all the members of the family, including the boys and men. This co-operative unity must have a powerful effect upon the life of the family. Perhaps it has a tendency to give that life too much of an industrial character. There may be too much inclination to "talk shop." There may be too little opportunity for the cultivation of the heart life, or of the hearth life, of the family; but there is a certain solidarity in the farm family that makes for the permanency of the institution.

3. Speaking particularly now of the youth growing up in the farm family, it can hardly be gainsaid that family life in the open country is remarkably educative. First, by reason of the fact that both the boys and girls, from even tender years, learn to participate in real tasks. They do not merely play at doing things, they *do* them. They achieve real results. They take part in the world's work; and, secondly, by association with older heads in this work, by having a share in these real problems, by understanding at an early age the good or evil results that come from definite lines of action, there comes a certain maturity of mind, a certain sureness of touch, when a job is to be done, that must be a powerful means of development, particularly in an age when the achievement of tasks is the keynote of success.

4. I believe that, on the whole, the moral standards of the farm family, as a family, are kept on a very high plane; partly by the fact of farm interests already alluded to, and partly by the openness of life prevalent in country districts. There are in the country few hiding places for vice, and vice usually has enough modesty not to wish to stalk abroad. I do not mean to say that the moral influences of the country are only good; but I do say that, so far as the purity of the family as an institution is concerned, the country mode of living is conducive to a very high standard.

Thus far I have named those reactions of the environment upon the rural family which seem to be, on the whole, favorable. There is something to say on the other side.

1. Probably, on the whole, mediocre standards are encour-

aged. If you are brought up in the Ghetto of New York, and manage to get money enough together, you can move up on Fifth Avenue, if you want to. The average farmer doesn't move unless he moves to town, or to a new region. If low standards prevail in the community, a particular family is likely to find itself influenced by these lower standards. There is a tendency to level down, because of the law of moral gravitation, and because it takes a long time to elevate any community standard. The average country communities are illustrating some of the disadvantages, as well as some of the advantages, of democracy. In some farm communities, the presence of hired laborers in the family circle has been distinctly deleterious to good social customs, if nothing else. In the country there is a tendency toward a general neighborhood life on the social side. There is a probability that aspiration, for either personal or community ideals, will get a set away from the farm, with the result that these ideals are likely to lapse in the country.

2. A great deal of farm life is of such a character that it makes it very hard for the mother of the family. Perhaps the effects of isolation are more abiding in her case than in that of any other member of the family. This is not to give currency to the popular, but I think erroneous, notion that there is a larger proportion of insanity among farm women than among other classes; but it cannot be denied that the type of work in the farm home in many communities, and few social opportunities, are likely to give a narrowness that must have its result on the general life of the family.

3. The health of the average individual of the country is all that could be desired, at least during the earlier years; but it is not unfair to say that the sanitary conditions, from the public point of view, are not good in the average open country. This must have considerable effect, in the long run, upon the health of the family, and must have a bearing upon the development of family life.

4. There is, on the whole, a serious lack of recreative life in the open country, and this fact unquestionably has a strong influence upon the atmosphere of the average farm home. It tends

to give a certain hardness and bareness that are not proper soil for the finer fruits of life.

5. The lack of steady income of the farmer's family is a factor that has a great deal to do with the attitude of the members of the family toward life, toward expenditures, toward culture wants, and toward those classes of people that have salaries or other steady income.

It should be noted that country life develops certain traits in the individual, which, without any special regard to the question of family life, must nevertheless influence the general spirit of the family. I refer particularly to the intense individualism of the country, and the lack of the co-operative spirit. There is neighborliness in the country; there is intense democracy; there is a high sense of individual responsibility; there is initiative; but this over-development of the individual results in anaemic social life, which in turn reacts powerfully upon the general life of the family.

To my mind, the advantages of the country, in respect to family life, far outweigh its disadvantages. This statement must, of course, be understood to have in mind the great mass of farm families, as compared with the great mass of urban families of somewhat similar industrial and social standards. I make no defense of many woe-begone rural communities that can be found in all sections of the country. But I do believe that, on the whole, the family life of the open country, whether judged with respect to its intrinsic worth, its effect on the growing children, its permanency as a social institution, or its usefulness as a factor in our national civilization, is worthy of high praise.

DISCUSSION

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There are four points which I should like to make. In such a discussion I am under no special obligation to relate them to each other.

In his annual address President Patten made a plea for the pushing out of the economist and his works into practical affairs. Three years ago in a talk which he gave to a group of visitors of a charitable society, he told them that dealing as they were with lop-sided families, families which had something ailing with them, they were bound to get lop-sided views of

relief. They should study for every family they dealt with on a philanthropic basis, one normal family. This preachment strikes me as indicating a line of joint activity for the economist and the social worker—where the broad view of the one and the methods of the other could be brought together. The case records of charitable societies have long been store-houses of valuable social information. They have been analyzed on the basis of the causes which throw these families into positions of dependence.

In the Pittsburgh survey we have applied these methods of investigation and record-taking to normal families, which may not be thrown into dependence but are thrown into economic distress and lessened economic efficiency, by disease or accident. We have taken out as units for study not the cases applying for charitable relief, but certain geographical areas or periods of time. Comparing cities of corresponding size for the past five years, Pittsburgh has ranked first and highest in both typhoid fever and industrial casualties. These two are the prime expression on the one hand of civic neglect, and on the other, industrial hazard and ruthlessness. Our purpose was to measure the social effects on the people themselves. Here we had units more compelling than death statistics, or tax-costs.

This was illustrated in the economic study of typhoid fever by Mr. Frank E. Wing, associate director, who collected data for six wards for a year, showing the proportion of wage-earners among typhoid patients, the income before and since, the number of weeks sick, the loss in wages by patients and by those who are obliged to give up work to care for them, sickness expenditure for doctors, nurses, medicines, foods, funerals; and the less tangible but even more severe tax involved in lessened vitality, lessened earning power, and broken-up homes, which follow in the wake of typhoid. Of 1,029 cases in six wards reported in one year, 448 cases were found and studied. Of these 26 died. One hundred and eighty-seven wage-earners lost 1,901 weeks' work. Other wage-earners, not patients, lost 322 weeks—a total loss in wages of \$28,899. The cost of 90 patients treated in hospitals at public or private expense was \$4,165; of 338 patients cared for at home, \$21,000 in doctors' bills, nurses, ice, foods, medicines; of 26 funerals, \$3,186. The result was a total cost of \$58,262 in less than half the cases of six wards in one year—wards in which both income and sickness expense were at a minimum. But there were other even more serious drains. A girl of twenty-two, who worked on stogies, was left in a very nervous condition, not so strong as before, and consequently could not attain her former speed. A blacksmith will probably never work at his trade with his former strength. A sixteen-year-old girl developed tuberculosis and was left in a weakened physical condition. A tailor cannot work as long hours as before and was reduced \$1 a week in wages. A boy of eight was very nervous, would not sit still in school, and was rapidly becoming a truant.

Similarly in the case of industrial accidents. At this morning's session Miss Eastman has told you of the economic incidence as found by her

analysis of the 500 industrial deaths in Allegheny in the course of the year studied, where half of those killed were under thirty years of age, where half were getting less than \$15 per week, where half had families to support, and where, of these latter cases, less than half received any contribution whatever from the employer toward the income loss.

Dr. Patten has told us that the greatest need of the generation is the socialization of law. Here we were putting court decisions and the master-and-servant law to a pragmatic test, apart from any legal theories of liberty of contract and assumption of risk. How does the common law work out in practice? How does it cash in when it comes to the common welfare? Similar card systems have since been made use of in Wisconsin and Illinois.

My point is, then, that the family affords a responsive, delicate litmus for testing many of the economic facts of the present-day social order. Its usefulness as such is only as yet partly explored. The serious studies recently made of standards of living—not of dependent families, nor even of normal families under emergent stress, but just the everyday economic issues of life, are perhaps the purest examples of such scientific treatment. Such studies as Mr. Chapin has made illustrate the large body of social facts available from such sources.

My second point is that we are dealing in Pittsburgh with overloaded families. In agricultural and domestic industry great numbers of household operations were performed as by-products by the male workers. Thus the water supply for a man's kine and for his household were identical. Not only is this changed with the division of labor, but the household must be maintained amid city conditions where the single family unit cannot master many wants, and in industrial towns badly located for any purpose other than production. My point is illustrated by a dispute between the superintendent of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Health and the controller of the city, since deceased, a bluff, honest, old-fashioned saver of city funds. The superintendent of the Bureau of Health wanted a rubbish-removal system; the controller held that rubbish removal was a householder's private duty. "It is as if," said Dr. Edwards, "every householder in Pittsburgh used his ashes to build his front walks, lit his morning fires with old newspapers, and fed his swill to the pigs." Dumping-places are few and remote in Pittsburgh, and the results have been that every alley, gutter, and corner has festered with refuse; and the problem of keeping the city clean and well has been a hundred fold increased. Long, scientific, medical names on a death certificate, translated in common parlance, were nothing more than a filthy tin can plus a house fly.

Similarly, we find Pittsburgh for the last ten years knowing its typhoid problem was a water problem and yet depending for immunity upon bottled water at 15c per bottle; and we find 50,000 old individual privy vaults in the city proper. Time does not admit of the expansion of this idea, from these homely illustrations to some of the more debatable undertakings of

the family analyzed yesterday by Mrs. Gilman. Miss Butler's studies of women in industry, for instance, go to show that in Pittsburgh the whole tone of wages in certain women-employing trades is fixed by the assumption that the girl is half supported at home. My point is that the sooner we disencumber the family of many tasks it is not equipped to handle under modern conditions, the quicker it will be in position to perform its real functions.

Homestead is an example, as Miss Byington has described it, of how the whole task of civilization is thrown back upon the home. Here is a town which is created by the greatest steel plant in the world; one of the master industries of the country, protected by our national tariff policies as few industries are protected, and studied at the close of one of the greatest periods of prosperity the country has known. What has that prosperity meant to the workers? Here, on the other hand, we have a town where time is measured since the strike when associated effort among men was crushed out, there has been no organization or civic life to meet the community problems. The mill, and the town because of the mill, have thrown the burden on the family life of the place. And in many things above the average, we find Homestead a town with gulched streets like a mining district and high death-rates, with, until a year ago, ungraded, unguarded railroad crossings, with rank water and no clean public recreation. It is a town where a majority of the workers are left no leisure by the mill to bear their share of the family responsibilities, and where, stated roughly, the families of 50 per cent. of the workers must choose between eating insufficient food or living in un-American homes, between giving children a normal life or owning a home.

It is a town which sums up the overloading of family life. Eliminating these encumbrances, the standard of living-studies should afford us clearer notions of just what functions we should expect of families, and the minimums which are demanded for their performance—minimums of comfort, as expressed in rentals and clothing, minimums of refreshment, as expressed in food and leisure, and minimums of reproduction, as expressed in terms of strong physical parenthood, household equipment for caring for the young, and child-training. On the test of these standards public opinion could base its judgments as to immigration, hours, wages, working-men's compensation in case of accident, and other influences that affect or jeopardize these standards.

My third point is that the household, existing against these odds, is made the goad for that damnable driving of men to which Mr. Devine has referred. The mill workers are for the most part tonnage men. They are paid on out-put. As Mr. Fitch states in his report, when the rate of pay is judiciously cut from time to time, this tonnage system of payment becomes the most effective scheme for inducing speed yet devised. Whatever a man's earnings may be, high or low, his family adjusts itself to that basis and that

becomes his minimum of comfort. The man who has had six dollars a day and is reduced to four dollars has a harder time getting along on that than the man who never has been able to develop four-dollar tastes. The mere possibility of greater earnings than any yet enjoyed does not suffice to rouse men to the required degree. Only a reduction accomplishes that, for it makes it necessary to struggle to reach once again the old wage which was the minimum of comfort.

My last point has to do with the relation of the family to the dynamic character of the population of our industrial districts. In the Royal Museum of Munich is a group of models of mediaeval towns, carved out of wood. The spires and the markets, the city wall and gates, the houses, gardens, and out-buildings are shown with a fidelity that has outlived the centuries. There was entrenched the fixity of things. A man was his father's son. He was burgher, or freeman, or serf, as his father was burgher, or freeman, or serf. His looms and his spinning wheels and his vats were as his father had contrived them. He lived in the house of his fathers and it served him well. Pittsburgh is the antithesis of all this. It is all motion. The modern industrial community is not a tank, but a flow. Not the capacity but the currents of its life are important. Sixty per cent. of the working population of Homestead are unskilled laborers. The great majority of these are newcomers, foreign-born. In one of the plants of the Pittsburgh district, the employment agent hired 20,000 men in one year to keep up the pay-roll of 10,000. Unless the skilled worker keeps himself free to sell his labor in the highest market, he is economically at a disadvantage.

I should not want to claim for this idea of flow as the distinctive element in industrial community life, such a revolution of conceptions as Professor Clark wrought in defining the production of wealth in terms of a flow of utilities. But two things are to be noted. First, that it strengthens the demand that we relieve the family in an industrial community from many of the old household responsibilities. Sanitation cannot be left to Tom, Dick, and Harry if they are on the go. Local health authority must be developed with strength and scientific standards enough to maintain clear water, adequate sewerage, good drainage. Men must have leisure enough to back up this sort of administration with effective citizenship. The lodgings of the floating immigrant labor force cannot be left to boarding-bosses and petty landlords.

The second point is that civic conditions and social agencies must be adapted so that mobile family units shall not be at a disadvantage. Let me illustrate in the matter of shelter, by pointing to *the man who lives in a company house, who rents from a local landlord*, and to the man who buys his own house. The English co-operative housing movement by which a workman buys, not a building but stock in a housing company, is a movement to give the sense of ownership without clogging mobility.

Similarly the ordinary form of accident-relief association ties the work-

man up tight, while a rational form of working-men's compensation would give him emergency resources whatever his changes in employment and whatever the disrupting influences of industry upon the family.

The development of such schemes is not more communistic than the development of organized work in a mill is socialism. They may be defined as giving elements of stability to the family other than geographical. They should lessen the overburdening of the family. By that degree they should equip the workmen to the more readily withstand exploitation and advance his living standards.